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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003259

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: CG MEETING WITH SADRIST COR MEMBER

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: Sadrist Deputy Baha Al-Araji told CG Petraeus 9/23 that Sadrist leaders in Najaf have begun to advocate dialogue with coalition forces, though Muqtada himself has not made a decision. Al-Araji said JAM is collecting lists of "bad" JAM commanders, which they may eventually turn over to the GOI, and which may be accompanied by requests for prisoner releases. He said the CG and AMB testimony in Washington was largely accurate, with some security gains but continued disarray on the political front. CG said the Sadr movement's own behavior had contributed to this disarray, and said it was time for the Sadr political movement to begin playing a constructive role. Al-Araji discussed attempts to form a new Shia bloc led by the Sadr movement with a platform of government reform. He noted that among other things, continuing negative Iranian influence remains an obstacle to progress. End Summary.

¶2. (S) In a 9/23 meeting with CG Petraeus, prominent Sadrist CoR member Baha Al-Araji said Muqtada Sadr left Iraq because of assassination threats, but would likely be back soon, possibly before the end of Ramadan. Al-Araji said he had been in Najaf recently and that a majority of Shia, a sheikhs and religious clerics affiliated with the Sadrist Trend have, over the last couple of weeks, begun to put pressure on Sadr to open dialogue with the Coalition. He said the decision now lies with Muqtada.

Purging JAM of Bad Actors  
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¶3. (S) Al-Araji claimed that Sadr has formed committees in each province to develop lists of "bad" JAM leaders. He said they may be prepared to turn these lists over to the GOI, and suggested a possible quid pro quo for help in getting Shia detainees released. He also said they had previously provided the PM with a smaller list of bad JAM members. The CG highlighted the upcoming detainee release that will be attended by the two vice presidents and the success of the guarantor program, noting that the bulk of the detainees released are Sunni because the vast majority of the detainees are Sunni.

Iraqi Politics  
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¶4. (S) Al-Araji shared his frustration with the political situation in Iraq as he provided his editorial review of the CG and AMB testimony, which he described as "close to the truth." Araji stated that no one can deny that security is better, but that the political situation remains very bad. Still, he believes that Iraqi leaders from all sects realize something must be done politically to move forward. The CG conveyed that Iraqi leaders need to come together, as exemplified in the spirit of the Communique.

¶5. (S) The CG said he looked forward to the Sadr political movement being a more constructive political force and

highlighted the damage done to the party by individual actors associated with the movement in terms of the assassinations of two governors, the Karbala incident, and complicity with Iranian arms smuggling agents. The CG challenged Al-Araji to figure out how Sadr could recover from this "black eye" to move forward, and said that we very much welcomed Sadr,s pledge of honor.

¶16. (S) Al Araji asked what the CG thought would happen to the government. The CG answered that it,s up to the Iraqi people to decide and that our position is to support the government elected by the Iraqi people. Al-Araji shared that the Shia do not feel like PM Maliki has done anything for them. He described DPM Barham Salih as a righteous and honest man whom the PM unfortunately does not listen to enough. The CG said it appeared that the PM was fully supportive of Salih,s activities and his outreach to the Provinces, and that the PM had done outreach himself, as well.

¶17. (S) Al-Araji stated they are attempting to form a new political bloc, comprised of the Sadrists, Fadhila, the Ja,afari portion of Dawa, and Qassim Daoud,s movement. The CG said this was their right in a democracy, though the end result may simply be further marginalization. Al-Araji described the bloc,s purpose as reforming the GOI rather than bringing it down. The CG stated that the Sadrists needed to be careful in castigating the performance of the current government, given that the performance of the Sadrism-run ministries (Health, Transportation, and Agriculture) was poor and reductions in the level of services in those ministries is well known to the Iraqi public.

Iranian Influence

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¶18. (S) Al-Araji described cultural and historical reasons that Iran does not want to see Iraq succeed. He said the Iranians see the US as their enemy and want to see the US fail. Furthermore, Iranian resentment of Iraq over the Iran-Iraq war remains strong. He believes the Iranians look upon Iraqis as subordinate junior partners. General Petraeus said it was sad to see the split in Shi,a Islam, and particularly troubling that many innocent Iraqis, including several aides to Grand Ayatollah Sistani, have been killed by militia associated with Sadr, and sponsored and armed by Iran. General Petraeus said we would welcome a productive relationship with Iran that would benefit all parties. Such a development would allow us to concentrate our efforts on defeating AQI.

¶19. (S) Al-Araji said we should not trust Iran to control their borders. The CG responded that we have an active program to detain Quds Force officers. Araji then concluded the Iranian segment with an elaborate ethnic joke, the punch line of which confirmed to an Iraqi listener the underhandedness of Iranians in general.  
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